

The President's Daily Brief

21 November 1969

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THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF


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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

The Chinese Communists are giving priority consideration to the southward extension of the road they are building in northern Laos, but are claiming that the road building is a Lao project. (Page 1)

Tokyo plans a review of its policies toward Communist China, but little change in current attitudes is expected. (Page 2)

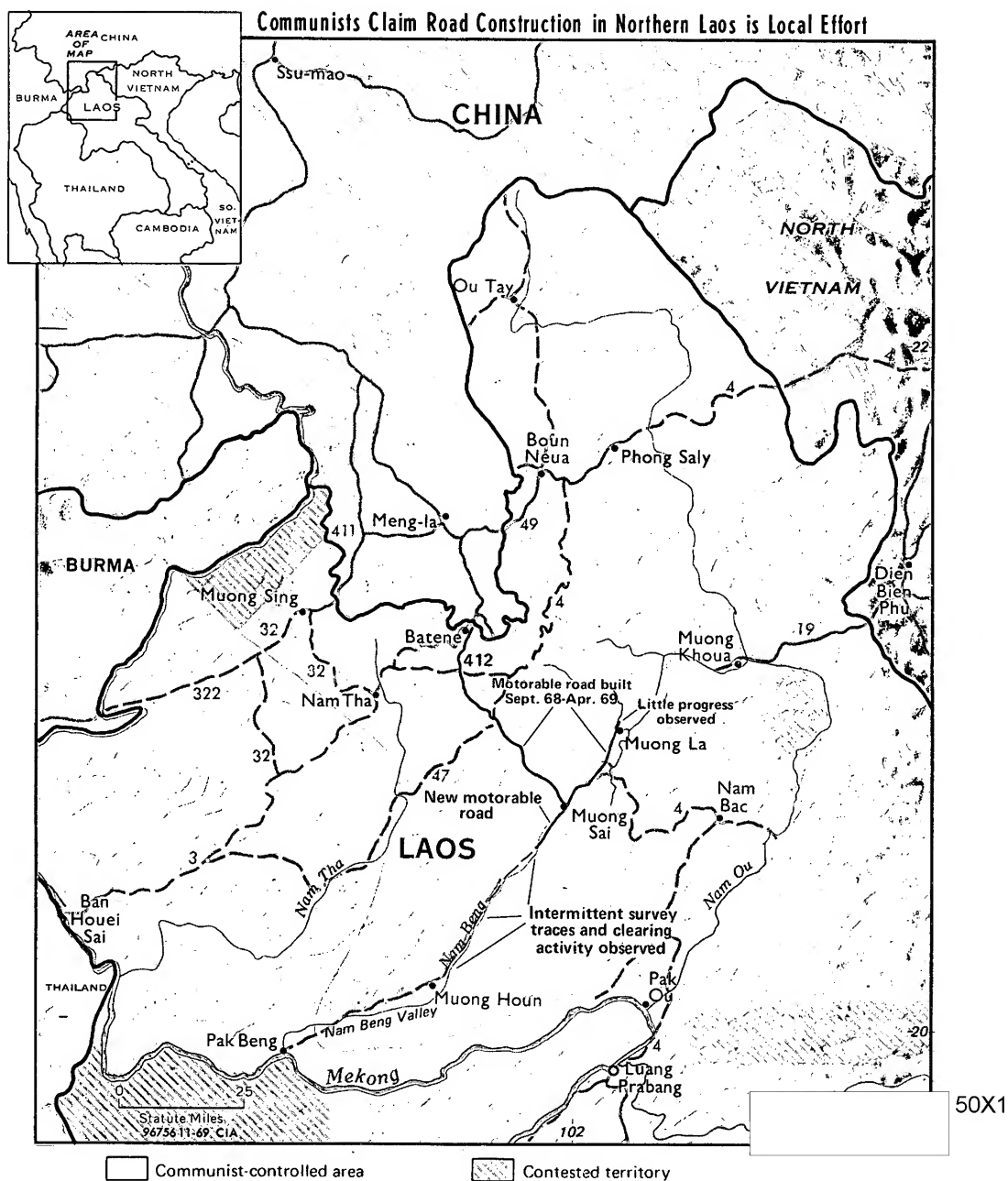
Recent enemy attacks in the South Vietnamese delta area, resulting in heavy ARVN losses, were probably a probe of the effectiveness of South Vietnamese fighting forces. (Page 3)

 troubles in the Palestinian refugee camps mount. (Page 4)

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The Soviets have sharply reduced air reconnaissance flights along the Chinese border. (Page 7)

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LAOS

According to a Lao aerial observer, Communist construction crews had completed some 11 miles of motorable road southwest of Muong Sai by 18 November. Aerial photography shows that intermittent survey traces and clearing activity have now reached Muong Houn, some 50 miles south of Muong Sai.

The Communists are presenting their road construction in the northwest as a Pathet Lao program. Peking's chargé in Vientiane, when asked by a Lao Government official to explain the meaning of these activities, denied any knowledge of Chinese involvement. The Pathet Lao spokesman in Vientiane recently told a local reporter that the road building south of Muong Sai was entirely a Lao Communist effort.

There is tentative evidence, in fact, that the Chinese may have changed the composition of the construction crew working south of Muong Sai. A government patrol which recently operated south of Muong Sai claims that the work force, although under the direction of Chinese engineers, is composed of North Vietnamese and locally conscripted Lao laborers. A local resident has said the North Vietnamese are operating heavy equipment, while the villagers are clearing brush.

If confirmed, this would be the first known instance where local villagers have worked on the current round of Chinese road building in Laos.

The Communists could have a rough motorable road to Pak Beng within three or four months if they continue their present pace. Judging from the lack of progress on the road being built northeast of Muong Sai, the current effort toward Pak Beng has a higher priority.

Indications that the Chinese are pushing southward in their road building activities have caused considerable concern within the Laotian Government. Prime Minister Souvanna may very well choose to accept the road building in the Nam Beng Valley as Lao rather than Chinese in order to head off a diplomatic confrontation with China.

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JAPAN

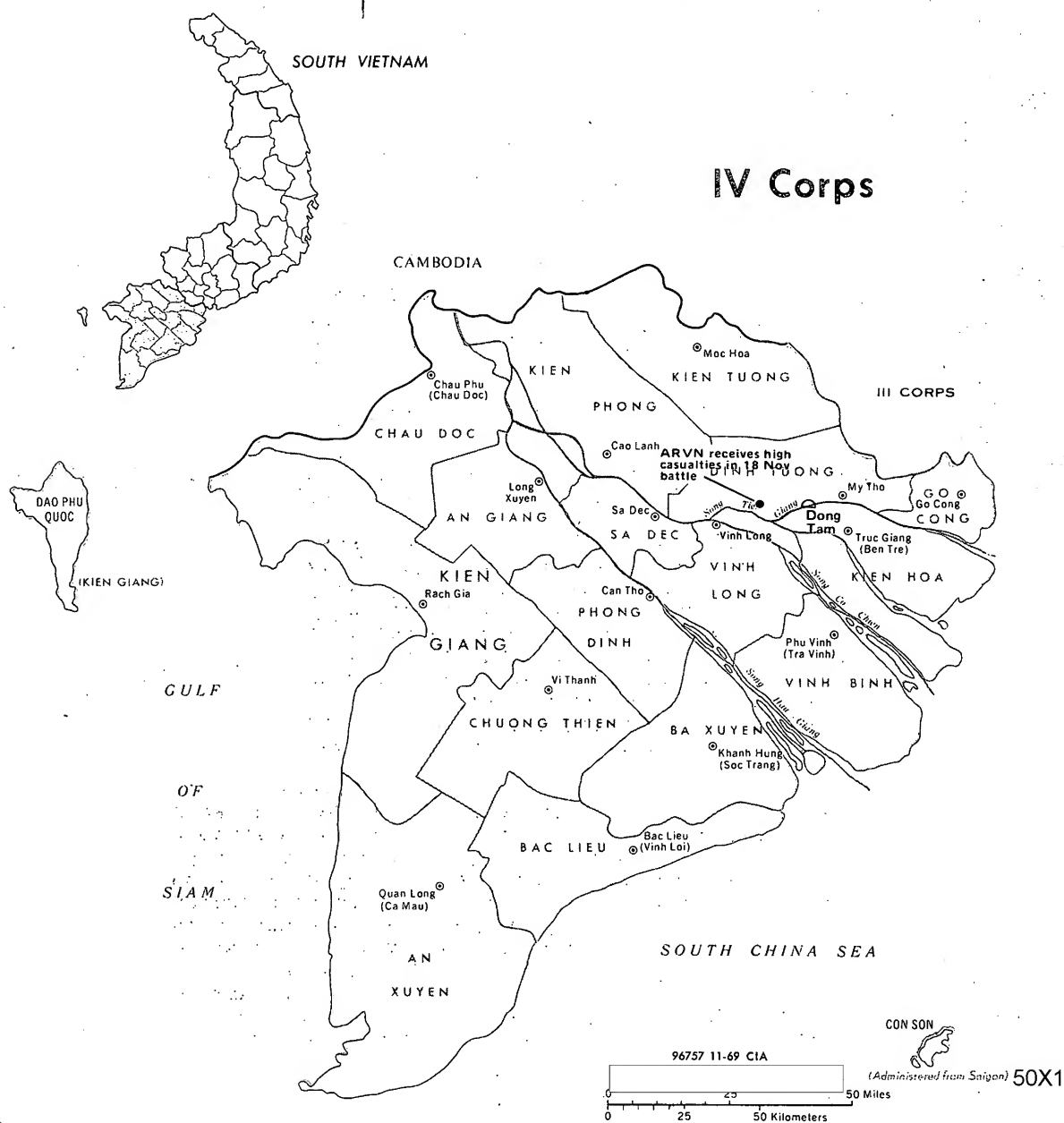
Once the issue of Okinawan reversion is out of the way, the Sato leadership plans a review of its policy toward Communist China. [redacted]

[redacted] both Sato and Foreign Minister Aichi believe that a "two-China" policy is the most realistic course for Japan, with any expansion of contacts limited to unofficial trade and cultural exchanges.

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This in effect would be a continuation of the status quo, a position supported by the top levels of the Foreign Ministry. This viewpoint will undoubtedly prevail as long as the US maintains its present policy toward China and Peking continues its hard-line posture toward Tokyo. Moreover, the government does not want to complicate its handling of the sensitive US-Japan mutual security issue next year by introducing controversial new policy initiatives; nor does it wish to disturb its present profitable relations with Taiwan.

At lower levels in the Foreign Ministry, however, many officials advocate a more flexible approach to mainland China--a position that is also supported in varying degrees by all the opposition parties, who wish to capitalize on sentiment among many Japanese for a "rapprochement" with Peking. Such sentiment has not crystallized to the extent that it is likely to cause the government undue trouble.



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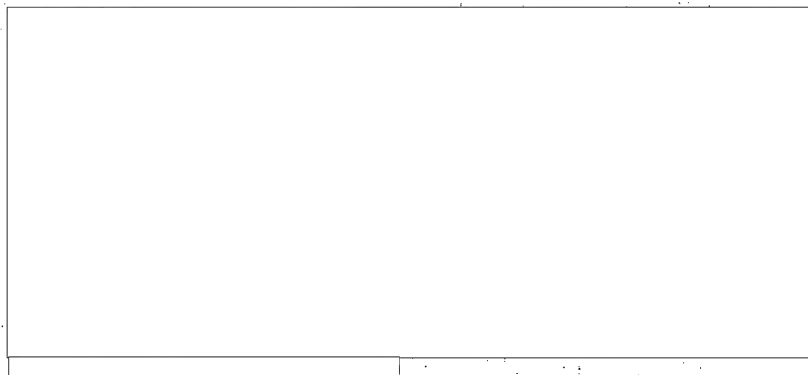
SOUTH VIETNAM

In a sharp battle in the delta province of Dinh Tuong, elements of three Viet Cong main-force battalions, strengthened by North Vietnamese fillers, killed 68 South Vietnamese while losing only 30 of their own men. Air support for the South Vietnamese, delayed by weather, was ineffective because the two US advisers had been killed by the time it arrived.

The action took place less than ten miles west of the US 9th Infantry Division's former headquarters at Dong Tam, recently turned over to the South Vietnamese. It is possible that this action was a probe to test the effectiveness of Saigon's fighting forces. A similar attack on a South Vietnamese naval headquarters in Kien Giang Province on 6 November also resulted in heavy South Vietnamese losses.

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LEBANON



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Problems regarding the refugee camps are mounting on all sides. According to a sensitive State Department cable, various fedayeen groups have assumed de facto control of the camps, taking responsibility for patrolling, maintaining law and order, and controlling access to them since the withdrawal of Lebanese Government officials in late October. The fedayeen are also recruiting camp inhabitants and giving them basic military training. Fedayeen activity, however, has been uncoordinated, and within the camps rival commando organizations have fought. Camp residents have also been terrorized by a fedayeen witch hunt for those who allegedly collaborated with Lebanese security forces during the recent show-down.

(continued)

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The government maintains that the Cairo agreement provides for Lebanese control of the camps and the coordination of fedayeen activity within them, but it is concerned that its position may be further eroded should the US cut off funds to the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). Beirut claims that such action would provoke a violent Palestinian reaction, and that any publicity that the US might so act would doom the current negotiations with the fedayeen. Although UNRWA has thus far been able to continue its welfare assistance to all camps, its Palestinian employees, emboldened by fedayeen support, are demanding program changes for which funds are not available and which may create administrative chaos.

Meanwhile, UNRWA has been caught in a crossfire of polemical charges between Arab and Israeli representatives in the course of debate in the UN General Assembly's Special Political Committee.

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SALT



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NOTES

USSR-China: The Soviets seem to be making an effort to lessen tensions along the Sino-Soviet border.

Soviet border reconnaissance flights are at the lowest level since the beginning of the year. Soviet reconnaissance flight activity along the border dropped off sharply after the September meeting in Peking between Kosygin and Chou En-lai. Neither side has reported a border clash since the fighting in August on the Sinkiang border.

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Chile: Talk of a coup attempt by military malcontents continues to grow in Santiago. President Frei on Wednesday put armed forces and police in Santiago and some other areas on alert and declared a state of emergency in the capital. These moves were sparked by reports that General Viaux's military supporters would refuse their pay this week because they consider a promised pay raise inadequate.

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